



## Episode 18: An Interview with Claire Allen

**Christine Goodner:** Well, welcome everyone. We are talking today with Claire Allen and Claire. Welcome to the podcast. I'd love for you to tell everyone a bit about your work in music and what you do.

**Claire Allen:** Great. It's great to be here. Thanks for having me. I'm a violinist and a violin teacher, and I live in Centerville, Virginia. My main job is teaching private violin lessons and group classes at Mason Community Arts Academy, which is the community arts division of George Mason University. So my students are all pre-college. So ages, I think my youngest seven or eight, and then going all the way up until seniors in high school and a couple adult students as well. And as of last month, I've become the string coordinator. So we're, we're taking some new steps in reorganizing our string departments. So I'll be heading that up and outside of that, I do some writing for violinists.com and I'm on their advisory board. I play whenever I can. And then in the last couple of years, I've started working as an adjudicator, primarily for American string teacher association certificate exams.

**Christine Goodner:** Yes. And we, while we've known each other online for a while, but we met in person finally at the ASTA conference right before the pandemic hit.

**Claire Allen:** I think you were like the last new person I met, like before, before everything shut down, it seems like a million years ago.

**Christine Goodner:** Well, one thing I try to do on the podcast is talk a lot to professionals about what was music and practice like for you as a child. So maybe you could just let us know. When did you start in music? I don't know if it was violin or not, but what got you started on music, and what did that look like for you growing up?

**Claire Allen:** Well, my family apparently still vividly remembers the year when I was two. When the only thing I would listen to was the soundtrack to the Music Man constantly for a year. Apparently, there was a Music Man phase and there was a Nutcracker phase. And I'm talking like your year-round, had an old VHS of Baryshnikov version of The Nutcracker. So I, I guess from an early age, I had a clear attraction to music and I guess the obsession started early. My first musical instrument was actually the recorder. One of my family members gifted me and inflicted on my parents. One of those plastic recorders. I think I was four (and it) came with the Beauty and the Beast songbook. So I was all about that.

My family would always listen to classical music. We'd watch great performances on PBS. We'd go to outdoor concerts, but I didn't start playing violin until I was nine in the public school orchestra.

And that's something which as a teenager and even into my twenties, I struggled with a lot of, I don't know if shame is the right word, but I was definitely very self-conscious about it. And I think particularly in Suzuki communities, I would feel very self-conscious about it because sometimes people can, there there's absolutely advantages to starting really young and having that great environment. But then the question becomes if someone's parents are not inclined to do that or don't have the resources or the means or live in an area or find the teacher where that's possible, it's like, do we just say, oh, well you don't get to be a musician. Sorry.

So I like to really stress that I started at nine and fourth grade and my public school system. I have a photo of myself from then. And I use that when I'm convincing my students that like, no, really, if I can fix this kid, (because that was me) I can help you. I promise.

So, I mean, I looked like someone that, you know, people would look at that posture and go, oh, I don't want that remedial student. That was something where I started there. But you know, sometimes people have a, oh, I picked the instrument and I was just always violin. So that's, that's how I got my start. Luckily I had a really, really great strings teacher - shout out to Mrs. Roth. Who's still teaching and then who I'm still in touch with a little bit. And she found time to give me one-on-one and recommended that I take private lessons.

**Christine Goodner:** That's great. And those school programs are so important. Not everybody is going to have access to music lessons at three or four years old, nor do they have to. I think it's really important to share stories of musicians who started, you know, quote unquote later, because there's not one way or the only way that can get us there.

**Claire Allen:** Yeah, no, I have other friends too, who started violin later and then two as a teacher, I think whatever the right age for the individual is, you know, I've had students who have started really young and yeah, they've just taken off. And I I've had students who started really young and they take off later, you know, it's a slow, steady type of thing there. You know, it's not necessarily a ticket to, if you start at X age by X age, you'll be playing whatever concerto. And then there's people who start later and within three years, they've quote unquote caught up in their repertoire to someone who started five years before. So there's just really no predicting these things, I think.

**Christine Goodner:** I think that's really, that's really important, especially if you're a parent thinking about, is it too late to start my child? They absolutely go for it and give it a try.

**Claire Allen:** No, it's not too late. And you know, it really depends on what you want to do with it. We all want music to be a significant part of our lives and to be something that's a force for good and something that we love. And I think for any field, it would be hard to say at four years old, you know, you have to go do this and you're going to be at the top of your career. And people find the path that they want to be on one way or another.

**Christine Goodner:** I'm conscious as a teacher, if someone approaches me to begin lessons, I will start people at many different ages, but if all my beginners are three or four, and then I have a ten-year-old contact me, I'm really conscious (to remember) I need another child about that age that's starting, or I need to refer them to another teacher . . . because it is hard to be the only nine or ten year old, around

a bunch of beginners who are four. I think making sure you're around other students who are your age also starting, that can help. It's hard to be alone then.

**Claire Allen:** And to be honest, it's really nice to hear those Suzuki Book One songs and like a three-quarter or even a full-size violin. Like you almost never get that unless you're doing review pieces. So it's actually such a pleasure to hear them with a, you know, with a bigger violin and older students are just more mature in their concept of the world. So they bring something different to it. So that's actually really quite refreshing. Sure,

**Christine Goodner:** Absolutely. So did you always love to practice when you were going up and when you first started the violin?

**Claire Allen:** So it was interesting. I was listening to some of your previous episodes to kind of prepare for this and I realized like I'm not going to help this discussion. So yes, I practiced a lot. I never had to be reminded to practice. My parents were not particularly involved in my practice because I started older. That was, I think my first strings teacher kind of convinced my first private teacher to take me because she was like, no, no, this kid's practices.

I would complain if you know, we go on vacation and we couldn't take the violin. That was like a source of distress for me. But what I will say is I'm not entirely convinced that it was always joyful practice or productive practice. And I don't know if I practiced so much because I had this innate joy and motivation and music, I think it might be because I have a very high capacity for self-torture and it made a big, it was born out of desperation to just kind of be good enough, even though I didn't know what quote unquote good enough is.

So, yes. So I did always practice. That was never something I really struggled with at least doing or finding time to. But violin also was my main activity as a kid. And especially once I hit high school, I was both playing varsity softball and violin. And after my freshman year, my parents sat me down and they're like, look, academics are staying it's violin or softball, but like, we're not doing this to our family. We're not doing this to you. You really have to choose. So violin was kind of my main thing. So that was what I did.

**Christine Goodner:** Well, it sounds like you really had an inner drive to get better, even if -like you were saying -it wasn't joyful. I think that's really important that you know, many people have come on the podcast so far and said, no, I didn't like to practice when I was young, but there are students who absolutely do that I work with. So I think it's really important. And I'm glad that to hear a balance and hear more people's experiences because parents are going to look around them and see various experiences from their kids to

**Claire Allen:** Right. I think, I think the thing is not to, even within families, you know, you see such different personalities, you know, one person's experience is one person's experience. So, and it's certainly possible to practice and not have it be productive or positive, which could actually be damaging. So the people who are only practicing a few times a week, but having it be a more positive experience, you know, my balance out on the end.

**Christine Goodner:** Right?

Well maybe we can just go forward a little bit. Do you have a specific moment or point in time that you remember feeling like, oh, I want to be a music teacher.

**Claire Allen:** So the first time people start to mention teaching is when about the time you tell them you want to major in performance in college, and then they start to tell you things that make no sense to a 14, 15, 16-year-old, you know, about health insurance and mortgages and viable jobs and things like that. And you're just like, well, I don't, I don't care about any of this. I just love this. I just want to play, I just want to get better. Like, what is this? Right. So you hear about it a lot. And so actually when I was in high school, my teacher at that time did something really wonderful for me, which of course, again, as a teenager, I was like, oh yeah, this is just what I'm doing. And now that I'm teaching, I realized really what an opportunity and what a gift it was, where she connected me with some younger students in her studio to kind of give them, helper lessons.

So it was fantastic because I was not at all in charge, which would have been good because I didn't know what I was doing, but I could help. Right. I could look at their practice list and say, we can do this. And in some cases that turned into a combination like babysitting for them and doing violin practice with them. I started Suzuki training and college mainly to free up core space. So I didn't have to take the pedagogy class at my school. So I did a couple of levels of that in graduate school.

It was very interesting because I was simultaneously rebuilding my own playing. You know, I walked into my first lesson at Peabody and I was very excited. I'd practiced a lot. I'd play Tchaikovsky concerto to get in all this stuff. And I'd practiced all summer. And I was ready to do new stuff with my teacher and had Rett prepared and he just goes, so this is how we hold the violin.

And this is how we hold the bow. And we proceeded to tear my technique apart and build it from the ground up. And that's really challenging to do. And an environment when then you have to go to orchestra rehearsal and play Strauss Tone Poems, or when other people in your studio are playing Paganini and prepping for their competitions. And you're like, so I think my hand goes like this.

So that was really challenging, especially because it's like, oh, I'm in grad school. I'm supposed to be prepping for my career. Or like I only have this many years left, but at the same time I was taking pedagogy class. And it finally, finally realized that trying to keep up in the classical music violin world, which can be very competitive, very exhausting, you know, that was kind of making me miserable and everything. I was learning a pedagogy class was just intriguing me.

You know, seeing when I was observing, seeing kids from week to week and seeing them get it with their teachers or learning ways, . . . oh, if you start the skill this way, this is how you really sequentially develop something.

So about the time I was in my second year of grad school, I had completely gone over to the pedagogy side. I was doing an internship where I was getting to teach when I was looking at what I was going to do for the next year. I was preparing a resume and things for teaching jobs. And you know, of course the great irony is all of that actually made my planning better. Once I like removed that. I'm not going to try to do this orchestra addition, competition. Who's better. Who's whatever chair, like once I just actually finally let that go after however many years of trying to do it, my playing got better than it had ever been. And the more I learn about teaching, it continues to go in that direction. And it's so ironic because you know, there's that horrible phrase that we have in our society. You know, those who can't do teach

or something, or it's like a lot of times people say, oh, so you play. And I say, well, yes. And primarily I teach and they go, oh right. . . It's like, I've given up on being a violinist, but that's not at all the case.

**Christine Goodner:** I've never thought so deeply about how I play than when I'd have to explain to a student how to improve something or learn something you really learn at a deeper level.

**Claire Allen:** Yeah. And it really it's really made me rethink my own practice. And it's really made me rethink my own mentalities toward things. It's very interesting to go from, you know, being that kind supportive teacher persona. Who's a genuine part of me, but who, I really definitely try to cultivate when I'm working with my students.

It's really hard to go between that. And then like the kind of self-loathing that's was going on in my own practice. It's like, I would never talk to a child this way. Why am I talking to myself like this? I think my students, especially by the time they're in middle or high school, you know, they're, they're amazing at taking an information and saying it right back to you, you know, they're really good at tests. They're really good at that. I'm trying to make sure that I grow my language with them.

So instead of saying, is that a good bow hold? You know, what is a good bowl hold for a student, right? It's a bowl hold that they have, maybe that feels okay. And that their teacher doesn't tell them they need to fix. And so I've started asking like, is your bowl hold working for you? What does this finger on your bow hold feel like I have this gesture that I used to do in in-person lessons all the time when we could use peripheral vision when we were teaching, and just kind of gesturing for my students to hold their violin up. So they do it because I tell them to, because they're student and I'm teacher and they're trying to do what I say.

So now it's like, well, does your violin really feel supported? Can your arm move underneath it? So I'm trying to really get away from words like good and bad and right and wrong. Because I found that even someone with quote unquote, good posture can still be really locked and really rigid. And you know, it can look like it's in the right place. And I think, especially on zoom, it's even harder to see these little details. And even in person, honestly, if you're not getting the right angle, you're not really asking them to move. It can look exactly right. And it can actually be hurting them.

**Christine Goodner:** Exactly. What an important topic. I know I find myself sometimes just telling some students like, don't think so hard and just play because it is that control - where we're just like, oh, I will do it right. And we just get so tense or so overthinking that we don't have the freedom to just make music.

**Claire Allen:** It's interesting because I can tell a difference between students who are really in their bodies and are really feeling things. And they're making adjustments based on feedback they're getting and students who are doing just kind of whatever. And they're waiting for me to say something and you know, they'll say, oh, what went well? They're like, oh, I thought this went well. And I said, why'd you, why'd you say that? Well, because you didn't say anything about it today. I was like, does that automatically mean you had a consistent contact point? You know, so I'm trying very much to shift the awareness from the judgment of the teacher, into their awareness of themselves and their awareness of the sound and to get out of that. I want to be good enough to what type of sound do you really want to create? I was talking to a student about control the other day, which I think is a huge thing, right?

Because that's what we want. We want control over the bow. We want control over the violin. We want control over our lives. And it got me thinking about my own ideas of what control is. And I consider

myself a, a recovering perfectionist and day recovering control freak to use the common term. And when controls, when that shows up in violin, for me, it shows up as tension because the more that we try hard and want it, the more we hold the instrument and the second we clutch the instrument, we've lost control.

It's so ironic because we've lost the very thing that we want so desperately. So it was said to my student in her lesson, you know, I think with violin, you know, control actually is when we have the freedom to do what we imagine on the instrument control doesn't mean stopping things from falling or stopping bad things from happening control is freedom to do what you want, because if your thumb is locked on the neck of the violin or on the bow, you're not going to have the sound that you want.

You're not going to be able to move as quickly. It's not going to sound as beautiful. And then sometimes we hear that and we respond to it. And then we grab all the harder, because if we try harder physically, that's what we're kind of taught. So you need more information. How can you get support without squeezing? Or how can I get out of my head and say, okay, I'm playing this because I want to get in this orchestra. Okay. But it's still music. What does it sound like? Right. What sound do I want? And I, you know, when we go to a concert hall, we don't say, wow, that person did it all right. Or, that person made no mistakes. They played all those notes one right after another. Correct. Right. We don't say these things. We say, oh my gosh, that was so beautiful.

We think about it, you know, really good live music does something to us or even good recordings, really it does something to us inside. And it connects with us on like a deep, emotional level. And when I'm really hearing an artist play, I'm not like, look at that bow hand. That is incredible. That pinky perfectly curved. That is the thing I am taking away from this performance. And I think too, and to be fair, because I have that background as a teacher of, as a violinist, I should say of constantly rebuilding my own technique. I do error, on the side of doing that with my students, I think to try to save them from my own fate and something that's evolving for me is trying to talk more about the music. Like, why are we doing all of this? Why do you think we're doing this? Because if your violin is pointed at the floor, your sound is going to go to the floor. We can't hear you, which is kind of the point where your arms can't move to do that thing that you want to do.

**Christine Goodner:** Absolutely. I'm always assessing that too. I think it's really . . . we can get into the habit as musicians of thinking the acceptance of our playing as acceptance of us as people. I think that's where we get into dangerous territory as well.

**Claire Allen:** Well, I know we've talked about Brene Brown and I feel like her work and writings have been something that keeps popping up in my life. And I keep saying, oh, that's probably really important. That's going to be a hard book to read. I'll do that later.

I guess maybe after the first year of the pandemic, I got to a place where I had the mental bandwidth to read a book that would require some self-reflection. There was a lot of rereading of some really light fiction or just other stories, a lot of escapist reading and the first part of the pandemic. But finally this summer I'm in a place where I can read more. So I finally read the gifts of imperfection in the last month. And when there's a quote from it that I wrote down, which is perfectionism is not self-improvement perfectionism is at its core about trying to earn approval and acceptance. And that just hit me. And that really made me look at myself differently. And that really made me look at my students differently too. Because when we're in that teacher role, we become the person that they're trying to earn approval and acceptance from.

And sometimes they're trying to make corrections or adjustments. Not because they want it for the music or they want it for themselves, but because they know, well then my teacher is not going to say anything to me about it. Then I don't, then I'm not going to have to feel like I did something wrong because even saying, oh, that sounding really great. I love all the notes. You know, you've got those Boeings and I think it's so close to, you know, being passed off to go to review land, but let's do it another week or so. And I'd like you to work on contact point in dynamics or let's really make sure that bowl holds flexible and you just see their faces fall.

Right. Because anything that's not, this was great. Check it off, go onto the next thing comes in as failure. I've learned to look for that and my students and kind of try, I'm trying, we'll see it's different with everyone, but trying to just kind of say, Hey, what does it mean to you? You know, do you feel comfortable with this? Do you feel this way? Yep. And sometimes like in my own playing, I have to make a decision like is driving this student to like another level of Polish. Is that going to make the perfectionism? Like, is it, are they going to learn from it or is it really just going to trigger their perfectionism? And can I get at this topic in another way with a new, you know, with new material in the future

(Pauses) I'll be really honest. One of the things I loved about everything being online and so many things being canceled, I loved that we didn't have to really stress about orchestra auditions as much. I love that. I never had to teach someone a piece that was five levels above their current playing level because of whatever orchestra they were in. And I love that we got out of that mentality. We were just focusing on making music and individual progress and having it be a joyful or a positive part of our day. There's so many good things about orchestra. There's, I'm fortunate. I live in an area with, we have an incredible public school program. We have incredible orchestra directors. The level is really high they're so supportive. They have amazing programs. And it was also nice to have a little, a little break to do that. Self-reflection for the students who are able to do that.

**Christine Goodner:** Absolutely. As I'm listening to you, I'm thinking about, you know, if a parent or family member has a student in a program like that, and there's something to be said for being in a really high achieving program and just, it helps with motivation and you get amazing experiences. So what would you say to a family maybe who's seen that that's taken a little bit of a toll on their student. Do you have any advice for parents? Because I think sometimes we can, I don't know, balance it out if we can't fix it at home by just having some conversations.

**Claire Allen:** Well, I think, I think the first thing is to just be really clear that I know every orchestra director and teacher wants what's best for their students. Every private teacher wants what's best for their students. Every parent wants what's best for their children. And for me, I think the best situation for everyone involved is an ensemble situation where a student is comfortably playing the repertoire at that level. So they can fully engage in the, so they can be matching Boeing's with the orchestra. You know, they can be listening to other instruments, new violinists. We we're like we have the melody. What, what are those bigger instruments over there? What's that? So, you know, I tell my students, if they're like I got in the first violin Orca in sexual, my orchestra, I'm like, great. So, you know, the cellos who sit across from you, like listen to them, I bet they'll have the rhythm for you.

So I would say that if you're fortunate enough to be in a, an orchestra, an ensemble system that has options, it's about finding the right fit for where your child is right now, which is not where they're going to be forever. And I would say that trust everyone involved in this situation. And if you're in a situation where you are not trusting the people who are giving you advice, then that might be a clue to use for

other conversations that might need to happen. So I think if you're trusting your private teacher, if you're trusting your orchestra director and then also to look at the time commitment, you know, I think it's very easy to say, oh, I want to get into X, high level, whatever thing. And we think, oh, I just have to get the audition and then I'm in. But then it's how many rehearsals does that add to your week?

How hard is the repertoire? How much are you going to be practicing that on top of what you're doing for your private lessons and your homework and your other extracurriculars. So when you're choosing something fits, think about the total schedule, commitment include practice time in that include wellness in that, you know, orchestra rehearsals are long and you have to be mindful of injury. You have to be mindful of healthy playing.

That's where you really want to look at your technique. If you've got those tension problems, long orchestra rehearsals are just going to make it worse. So I guess to kind of say that a little more succinctly, make sure you're trusting the people. You're getting advice from find the ensemble that's right for you at this time, knowing that there is always going to be another opportunity. It can feel like life or death, especially if you're working with a teenager who is very much in that part of their life, where everything is so huge, you know, oh my gosh, I didn't get into the top orchestra this one year.

And then just to take in the total experience that you're going to have as, as someone who is stress over orchestra additions through high school, um, maybe severely disrupted my family's quality of life. Sorry, mom, I can, I can say that no experience in any situation, orchestra or life is worth it. It's, it's a lot easier now that I'm in my thirties versus when I was 1516, for sure. Um, so, and, and that's where that perfectionism plays into, right? Cause it's the, the chair or the level or the word advanced that can fit that need for that approval and that status, which maybe has something to do with the music itself, maybe doesn't, and that's, that's a hard conversation that every person can only have with themselves about what they're really looking for out of a given situation. Yeah,

**Christine Goodner:** Exactly. And I thought what you said about, you know, rest and sort of health, in general, is really important too. We were like, we're recording this in the midst of the Olympics going on. And he was thinking about those athletes, like, you know, they have stretching routines and nutrition routines, and you know, our wellness and health might look slightly different as musicians, but we are, I've heard, it said like athletes of the small muscles we've really put our bodies and minds through a lot to play our instruments. So it's really important to focus on the health-related parts of that.

**Claire Allen:** And I think there's been a big shift in the last 10 years in the music world. When I was an undergraduate, I had a very severe performance injury that took me out for about a year, resulted in a lot of physical therapy. There's reasons. I'm kind of obsessive about my student's technique now. And at the time I was told, you know, don't tell people that you've been injured. You know, when I was an undergraduate, that was the advice I was given. So the idea that I would come on, a podcast that anyone in the world could listen to and say, the I'm a professional violinist and I've been injured was like totally taboo. And now I think so many more people are comfortable talking about that. I think we've learned that it's much more widespread for me as rarer to meet someone who says, yeah, I was really lucky and I had teachers and coaches and people who made sure that I paced myself and I developed my technique in this way.

And it wasn't a PR and I've never had an injury for me. That is, I've met people like that, but it's so rare. More often, I'm more often I'm trading physical therapy stories with people. So I'm, there's a lot of great info out there. Obviously, people always need to talk to their own medical professionals about this, but yeah, pacing yourself, pacing your practice. And do you have so many great resources about the many



different ways that practice can look like for students and professionals and for families? You know, it's not always that we have to do our 10 repetitions in a row for the X number of minutes in a day, a big change I made in my studio going forward into this fall, as I actually took the time requirement out of the practice part of my studio policy. And instead I said that I want practice to be consistent and I want it to be effective.

And I want it to be practice that is completing the majority of the assignments given in a week. Cause I think, you know, the people who were not practicing the numbers I'd kind of made up or feeling shame and stigma about that. And the people who were thought that that was an instant ticket to success. Like, oh, I'm doing my, you know, I'm practicing two hours a day. So obviously I'm going to be this good. So I very deliberately changed that. And I've been trying to affirm my students when they're like, so I went on vacation. I haven't really practiced. I'm like, good. Do you have fun? Can you send me pictures? That's awesome. Like, let's, let's do some stuff to get back into it, but that's so good that you did that.

**Christine Goodner:** Yes. I've been doing that too. And like, wow, we couldn't go anywhere for so long. I hope you had a great time. We can get back into practice now that we're back.

**Claire Allen:** So I think the mindset is so important and maybe some days, if a planned rest day where you say today is a rest day, I don't, I'm not going to open the case. I might listen to music if I want to, if I feel like vial and I will, but I'm not planning on practicing today. I'm going to spend time with my family. I'm going to go on a hike. I'm going to take a nap. I'm going to read a book and then you come back to it and you've got a plan versus the guilt of, oh, I should practice today. And then you get to the end today and like, oh, I didn't practice. And then that feeling of shame and guilt that goes into the next day do to cause then you have to feel like you have to make up for it. I love just, well, I use a lot of your stuff in my teaching. So I love that mentality of working to create the environment and being flexible about it and being consistent and making it a habit and a routine, but also saying, you know, today practice might be 10 minutes of bow taps on an exercise and listening and you know, it doesn't always have to look

**Christine Goodner:** Exactly. And I think there's some students, for example, with ADHD diagnosis or different ways of learning that do much better with short really focused sessions a couple of times a day. And if you try to get them to practice for an hour, they're not going to be successful at that. So really what helps this, like you said, the student get the majority of their assignments accomplished and that doesn't look like one thing for everybody.

**Claire Allen:** The teacher has standards in the studio. And I think most of us have really thought a lot of those in the last year. But you know, I have a student who is a senior this year and I've had them for a very long time. I think since fifth grade maybe kind of runs together. But I remember very early on practice was like such a big thing with this particular student. And I, my policy used to be, you have to practice five days a week, plus you can have less than day and then maybe a day off. And this person was consistently doing maybe three or four. So every lesson was like, you need to practice more. You need to practice more. And it took a long time to get through certain things, but they stayed with it. And eventually I kind of relaxed because, well, okay, this person is playing violin because they like it.

They're not trying to get into conservatory and you know, fast forward me relaxing meant that we had more conversations about how to practice this student has maintained an interest in school orchestra. And then last year they told me out of nowhere, I said, you know, what's how's school going. You take anything fun this year. And they said, well, actually I thought I'd take AP music theory. They were a hundred percent into the online lessons. They always emailed me their assignments. They took great

notes. They don't practice the most of anyone, but everything they do is efficient. And we have a great relationship. They get their recital pieces ready. They're interested in different things. I kind of gave up on that time limit, but here's a student I have a great relationship with and who's getting things done and has a genuine interest in music. So why am I going to harp on a number? Right.

And they're not saying to me, you know, I want to take college auditions and go to conservatory because that is a hard lesson and that's a different goal. And there are, there are different expectations and different things you need to do, but still it's not a number. It's what you're doing with the time, right?

**Christine Goodner:** Yeah. The interest is there, the progress that sounds like it's there, even if it was slow at first and that's what we're going for.

Pauses - I would love first to just hear where people can connect with you to find your writing. I know you have a shop with some fun violin items available and just anything that people can do to connect with you and your work and ideas.

**Claire Allen:** Sure. My website is Claire Allen, violin.com, which desperately needs to be updated. That's an August project of mine and Clare. Alan violin is also my Instagram account where I kind of share stuff about my own violin life, little clips of me playing photos of my cats. If it's vaguely violin related and an Allan violin studio is my Instagram for my studio where I essentially just reshare to my stories, anything that you post because it's always so good. Um, or, and as you know, and as we get back into more in-person things occasionally with always with permission, there'll be little clips of my students or whatever, by Ins.com, you can just search my name, Claire Allen. And some of my articles will come up and yeah, the Merck, the Mert shop, that's kind of me trying to have a little bit of fun. And actually one of my shirts that I designed is called rest day. So it's a quarter of rest. And then it says day. So to kind of be both musical and affirming of that. So it's called cat and fiddle music designs. That's the working title. And there's a link to that in my Instagram profile.

**Christine Goodner:** Great. Yeah, we can make sure everybody has links to find anything like that they want. And I know I've shared some of the articles you've written with other teacher friends and with other parents, I really enjoy your writing and your perspective on all sorts of music things. So I hope people will find your articles and read those as well. Well, I'd like to wrap up and ask people to just share one final tip about practice that you could leave listeners with. It can be something we've already talked about that you want to recap or something brand new. I'll let you think about what you might want to share.

**Claire Allen:** I would say kind of to go with, along with what I've said before, the secret to effective practice is understanding yourself. And I think that's a lifelong thing that we're all still trying to do. But I think if you're a parent practicing with a child, understanding how your child learns and what works for them, rather than trying to reach goalposts or external things is going to be more effective. And if you are someone like my past self was who just desperately wants to be good enough at violin and is trying so hard and people keep telling you to loosen up and relax, first of all, ignore them because just relax has never helped anyone in the history of anything and ask yourself what you need to understand more about yourself. And that's going to be the key to getting past whatever it is you're going through. Oh, I love that.

**Christine Goodner:**

There's a quote I love that says self-awareness plus self-compassion is the key to everything good by Melissa Dinwiddie. And I just really, I think that's right along the lines of what you're talking about.

**Claire Allen:** Violin has been again, a great way to understand myself more. You really have to know yourself really well. So that's, and that's kind of the journey you think you're playing violin, but you're actually learning about yourself.

**Christine Goodner:** Agreed. Yes. Well said, well, thank you so much for the time to talk today and how we hope we can do this again sometime in the future.

**Claire Allen:** Thanks for having me.